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ABSTRACT

Rural students face many challenges in gaining a sound education, but one of the advantages they have is that their schools are set in a community context that values a sense of place and offers a unique set of conditions for building social capital. A school-community partnership model of school renewal might be an appropriate means by which rural school communities can improve their educational processes. Six types of connections in rural communities important to developing an authentic school-community partnership are social capital, sense of place, parent involvement, strong church ties, strong school-business-agency relationships, and use of the community as a curricular resource. A school-community partnership model requires a constructivist type of leadership that encourages adults in a community to consider the views of others. Constructivist leaders are open to change, welcome diverse thinking, and are not driven by institutional constraints and bureaucracies. School-community partnerships, led by constructivist leaders, can enable the growth of families, schools, and communities in a way that may be more essential for rural than urban schools. Rural school renewal is not the imitation of urban reforms, but the joining together of schools and their local communities in the creation of something new that has meaning and understanding for rural students. (Contains 74 references.) (TD)

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School-Community Partnerships in Rural Schools: Leadership, Renewal and a Sense of Place

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Introduction

Rural schools are vulnerable to imitating the reform standards of national and urban schools. Urban schools, to which much of the research on current reform efforts has been directed, are not rural schools writ large. Neither are rural communities like urban neighborhood communities. Hodgkinson and Obarakpor (1994) declare "rural poverty is not the same as urban poverty in a different setting" (p. 2). Rather, the context of *rural* has its own set of community identifiers that make rural schools dramatically different from their metropolitan counterparts. The goals and purposes of schooling and educational renewal processes appropriate for urban and suburban schools may be inappropriate for rural schools. As aptly expressed by Theobald and Nachtigal (1995), "The work of the rural school is no longer to emulate the urban or suburban school, but to attend to its own place" (p.132). Rural students face many challenges in gaining a sound education, but one of the advantages they have is that their schools are set in a community context that values a sense of place and offers a unique set of conditions for building social capital important for helping students succeed in school.

The purpose of this article is to explore how a school-community partnership model of school renewal might be an appropriate means by which rural school communities can improve their educational processes. Such a model capitalizes on a community's sense of place and other distinctive features of rural school communities. Central to a partnership model of school and community is a reexamination of the goals and purposes of rural schooling. A school-community partnership model is built on a set of distinctive characteristics of the settings in

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which these schools are located. Partnerships require connections. This article develops a set of six types of connections in rural communities important to developing an authentic school-community partnership model. Where such connections flourish, they provide the best hope for rural school renewal. A school-community partnership model requires a different kind of school leadership, a type of leadership that will let go of traditional and behavioral models and embrace those that are relational and can build on the school community's own sense of place.

As an aside, the term *partnership* is used advisedly. It is one of those terms of the 1990s, like *citizenship, participatory democracy, active citizen*, or *stakeholder,* which has different meanings in different contexts. In much of educational research and writing, such terms have been used as an essential part of the accountability movement and the marketization of schools. It often implies the encouragement of involvement, commitment, and responsibility based on individual self-interest needed to protect one's "investment" and as a way of exerting institutional control over individuals. Thus, parents are expected to participate in schooling by making responsible choices, supporting schools, and sending their children to school prepared for what the school requires. I eschew these connotations and prefer to view partnerships from a more ethical stance. Partnerships are built on social interaction, mutual trust, and relationships that promote agency within a community. I do not deny, however, that partnerships of this sort are susceptible to abuse. Obviously, power relationships are a large part of the literature as well as everyday life (e.g., Foucault, 1977; Giddens, 1984).

What Aims Should Rural Schools Seek to Fulfill? Local Community or National Priorities?

Paul Theobald (1997), in his book, *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community,* provides an intriguing sociohistorical analysis of the economic tensions between agriculture and commerce in England (which was subsequently paralleled in this country), that drove our ancestors off the lands and into the cities. He builds a strong case for why urban schools and national interests came to predominate over rural schools and community interests. Likewise, he presents a philosophical analysis, which begins with classical Greek society and traces the development of ideas concerned with the improvement of the quality of individual life, which lead to less emphasis on the improvement of community life.

Theobald (1997) argues that classical Greece was an example of a communally oriented system. Greeks, he claims, "lived their lives in service to the community rather than in the service of their own individual wishes and desires" (p. 9). They rationalized that working toward the common good could preserve order and harmony. In the 18th century, modern liberals advanced the notion that community needs were best served through the pursuit of individual desires. Theobald traces this change in orientation back to St. Augustine, who preached the doctrine of dedicating one's existence to God, not to the community, thus establishing an individual rather than a community orientation. The Renaissance,

preceded by the Protestant Reformation, reinforced the notion that individuals should make choices guided by rational thought. Rene Descartes believed that the quality of an individual life was dependent on rational powers that individuals could exert. Thus, unlike the Greeks, the pursuit of individual power and quality of life became more important than the pursuit of community agency and the improvement of the community.

The urban model of schooling and how schools should be controlled came into focus in the 19th century during the Populist Movement, followed by the Progressive Era. Theobald (1997) points out that the election of William McKinley in 1896, who defeated the populist William Jennings Bryan, brought an end to a federalist form of government, which favored political power residing in decentralized local communities, with only residual authority residing in a central government. The Populist view held that local citizens would pursue the common good, rising above their own individual interests (Dunne, 1978; Nachitigal, 1997; Theobald, 1997). Likewise, Thomas Jefferson believed that the economic and political stability of America rested in the political decisions made by communities.

In contrast, Alexander Hamilton and the Federalists believed in a system run by an urban elite that would take a more global view of politics and economics and use its power in the national interest. During the Progressive Era, schools became increasingly professionalized (including a reliance on "experts" and standardization for the sake of efficiency), distancing themselves from parents and the community and establishing centralized bureaucracies no longer controlled by the local community. This came at a time when economic and political power was shifting to urban centers and the influx of immigrants made national leaders wary of providing too much power to local communities. Thus, the state and a nationally controlled urban model of schooling became prominent and were held up as an example for all schooling (Cremin, 1976, 1978). The tension remains today between the desire for local control of schools and the reality of a national culture and agenda.

Those who control schools control the aims of schooling. So long as the federal government disseminates guidelines for the improvement of schools and as long as educators and policymakers enshrine the urban model of school improvement, rural schools will find it increasingly difficult to maintain their own control and community agendas. If schools are about cultivating the intellectual and moral autonomy of individuals, should they be oriented toward serving community interests, should they prepare students to contribute productively to the national economy, or both? Who should decide?

On the one hand, many rural parents would like to keep their children close to home, and many rural students would prefer to work among family and friends in a familiar community. For many rural communities, however, it is a boom and – bust economy. There is a heavy reliance on the belief that work consists of hard physical labor, generally performed outdoors, such as seasonal work. Sitting behind a desk, standing behind a counter, or depending on a computer are often associated

with oppressive, anti-union, corporate bosses. Lack of a pool of jobs in rural areas may not be viewed as a major problem for rural residents, so long as there are jobs to be had (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999).

On the other hand, some parents and students are oriented outward beyond the community with the hopes of acquiring the basic literacy and other skills needed to move out of the community, go to college, and seek a job or profession that will allow students to live a successful life beyond the community. This contributes to the diminishment of communities and often to the unhappiness of individuals who would prefer to serve their local communities. Rural youth often are not given the information and skills they need to make an informed choice about where they wish to live and work. Frequently, schools are not responsive to local concerns. Teachers and school principals need to reconsider where they stand on the intrinsic value of intellectual pursuits and whether education aimed at economic development is as anti-intellectual as education aimed at global economic competitiveness (Kannapel & DeYoung, 1999). Intellectual development aimed at the improvement of a local community provides an immediate and richer educational context than the global economy.

In a parent-teacher-community partnership model of school renewal, the importance of shared decision making around community goals, needs, and the purposes of schooling is paramount. Partnership must be built on relationships that exhibit mutual trust and caring and provide opportunities for those in the community to have their voices heard in these decisions.

Characteristics That Challenge and Provide Opportunities for Rural School-Community Partnerships

As indicated earlier, the notion of partnership can be interpreted in different ways. By school-community partnerships, I mean the development of a set of social relationships within and between the school and its local community that promote action. Again, partnerships are built upon social interactions, mutual trust, and relationships that promote agency within a community for the development of the common good. Rural communities are characterized by qualities that both challenge and provide opportunities for support of school-community partnerships. Their ability to adapt to a partnership model of schooling may be more natural for rural communities than for urban communities.

The most prevalent conception of rural is the U.S. Census definition, which designates as rural towns of 2,500 or fewer and unincorporated areas located in non-metropolitan counties. Metropolitan counties are those including a city of at least 50,000 or whose adjoining counties having a highly urbanized population (Hobbs, 1994). The 1990 Census reports that 23% of the U.S. population lived in non-metropolitan areas (Sherman, 1992). Although it is difficult to define a set of universal characteristics shared by these areas, many writers have identified some

common features of rural communities and their schools. These include economic, educational, social, and teacher-school characteristics.

Economically, rural areas have a higher proportion of low-wage, low-benefit jobs than do urban areas (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). The median family income in rural areas in 1990 was about three fourths that of metropolitan areas (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). Poverty rates are higher in rural areas, and from 1976-1986, poverty rates increased twice as fast for rural areas as compared to urban areas, with the highest poverty rates occurring in the rural South (Stern, 1994). African Americans living in the rural South represent 97% of all poor, rural African Americans, but only 44% of poor, rural whites live in the South (Summers, 1993).

Educationally, rural residents generally achieve lower formal levels of education than urban residents. In 1990, high school completion rates were 7.8% lower in rural areas compared to non-rural, whereas 9.5% more of the metropolitan population had completed college (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). In the 1980s, the educational level of rural males actually declined (McGranahan, 1994). Rural youth are less likely to take college preparatory classes and to attend college than their urban counterparts (Greenberg, 1995; Stern, 1994). Fewer rural youth aspire to college when the local occupational structure seems not to reward it (Bickel & Spatig, 1991; Snyder, Hoffman, & Geddes, 1999).

Socially, many rural residents strongly identify with their place of residence and are loathe leaving it to pursue higher education or careers (DeYoung, 1995; Howley & Howley, 1995; Seal & Harmon, 1995; Theobald, 1997). Relationships and connections to other people are given primacy (Hass & Lambert, 1995; Haas & Nachtigal, 1998). Direct, verbal communication is normative because layers of bureaucracy are lacking (Nachtigal, 1982). A person's word is considered a binding agreement (Nachitgal, 1997). In terms of race, religion, and socioeconomic status, rural communities tend to be homogeneous (Nachtigal, 1997). Traditional values such as discipline, hard work, and the importance of family are the norm (Nachtigal, 1997; Seal & Harmon, 1995). Residents of rural communities view them as safer and more connected to nature (Herzog & Pittman, 1995). For many, the aesthetic quality of rural life is important (Theobald, 1997).

The isolation of rural school districts offers some advantages and disadvantages. Of the nation's 15,133 school districts, 47% are located in rural places encompassing 28% of the nation's schools (Hobbs, 1994). On average, rural schools have smaller enrollments than do urban schools (Sher, 1983; Stern, 1994). Small schools tend to cultivate a positive school climate, an orderly environment, a high level of student-faculty engagement, and better school-community relationships (Kearney, 1994; Tompkins & Deloney, 1994). The dropout rate in rural schools is smaller than for urban schools, with the exception of African-Americans, where it is the same as for urban schools (Khattri, Riley, & Kane 1997). Student absenteeism is a less serious problem in rural schools than in urban schools (Lippman et al., 1996). Rural students are less likely to be living with single parents than are urban

students (Lippmann, Burns, & McArthur, 1996). Rural schools often serve as the cultural and social center of the town (DeYoung & Lawrence, 1995; Dunne, 1978, 1983; Herzog &Pittman, 1995; Larsh, 1983; Nachtigal, 1982; Seal & Harmon, 1995; Stern, 1994). Typically, there is a strong sense of community within rural schools, and they are tightly linked to the communities they serve (Theobald & Nachtigal, 1995).

In contrast, due to a smaller tax base and lower property values, rural schools are more often under-funded and provide fewer opportunities to learn than schools in other communities (Herzog & Pittman, 1995), and they provide fewer course offerings and special programs (Ballou & Podgursky, 1995; Hall & Barker, 1995). Rural schools often reflect the economic and social stratification of their communities and are influenced more strongly than their urban counterparts by the cultural and economic outlook of the community (Seal & Harmon, 1995). Rural schools have not implemented technology to the same extent as non-rural schools due to lack of infrastructure and resources (Howley & Howley, 1995).

Teachers and other professionals in rural schools generally obtain their education outside the community (Theobald, 1997; Theobald & Howley, 1999). As a group, they are younger and less experienced than their urban school counterparts, have less professional preparation, are paid less, and receive fewer benefits (Hare, 1991). They are more likely than urban teachers to take second jobs. Many rural schoolteachers report feeling professionally isolated (Massey & Crosby, 1983; Stern, 1994). Teacher behavior is more scrutinized in rural districts, making teachers vulnerable to community pressures (Nachtigal, 1982; Peshkin, 1978). Hiring preferences often are given to locals, who are viewed as understanding the community ethos and more inclined to preserve the status quo, rather than outsiders (Nachtigal, 1982; Peshkin, 1978).

Various strands of research have collectively demonstrated that poverty plays a key role in school outcomes for urban and rural students. What is not known, however, is whether poverty alone is the implicating factor or whether location (e.g., urban, rural) also makes a difference (Khattri et al., 1997). Rural schools, however, have many assets not found in urban schools, particular socially engaged communities and small-school advantages. Conversely, they are more economically and educationally disadvantaged and have difficulty in attracting high quality teachers.

Obviously, not all rural school communities are the same. Gjelten's (1982) rural school typography classified five types based primarily on economy and demography. He suggested that contemporary U.S. rural school communities are significantly different and that at least two of them have norms and social dynamics that distinguish them from those found in metropolitan areas. Two types, however, due to their proximity to metropolitan areas, are entangled in the social and economic dynamics occurring in cities. High-growth locales are those immediately adjacent to expanding metropolitan areas, and re-born rural communities are those

inundated by city "refugees" attempting to escape congestion, crime, polluted environments, and so forth. These are mostly tranquil and scenic spots. Many seek permanence and a sense of community.

A third type is the sort of place studied by Peshkin (1986). Gjelten (1982) describes such places as stable rural communities that are still involved with market agriculture and able to maintain local school traditions while adjusting to national schooling demands due to a stable local tax base and engagement with the local and national economies.

Gjelten's (1982) remaining two types include depressed rural areas, where the local economy is underdeveloped and out-migration is high, and isolated rural areas, where communities are far removed from transportation and commerce centers. They are persistently impoverished and dependent on mining, tenement farming, seasonal harvest, and retirement incomes. Unfortunately, communities of the last two types continue to grow, whereas stable rural communities continue to decline (Bender et al., 1985; Sherman, 1992).

Certainly, the type of rural community in which a school is located will determine the school's poverty level and its sense of isolation. However, such communities are often tightly knit, take pride in their sense of place and its history, and provide social capital for their children. Familiarity, community spirit, the influence of elders, and social activities in which the whole town participate provide opportunities that support a parent-teacher-community model of school renewal. Researchers need to learn how community social interactions, trust, and relationships that promote agency within a community for the development of the common good mitigate the influence of poverty on school outcomes, especially in depressed and isolated rural communities. It is important to learn what kinds of community connections contribute to the development of teacher-parent-community partnerships in rural schools.

School-Community Connections

As indicated earlier, the most commonly identified school renewal advantage for rural school communities is their close connections with the surrounding community. Rural families often have deep roots in a community, dense relational networks, and strong intergenerational closure that serve to strengthen community norms, values, and attitudes. The social characteristics of rural communities argue for a type of school renewal that builds on the capacities that these schools already possess and are already known to contribute to school renewal. To a great extent, although economic, educational, and some human capital may be lacking, there appears to be an abundance of social capital inherent in already existing relationships in these communities that needs to be tapped. In addition, other advantages that need to be maintained or strengthened include but are not limited to cultivating a strong sense of place, providing opportunities for parent

involvement, strengthening church ties, building strong school-business-agency relationships, and using the community as a curricular resource. It is these connections between school and community that build social capital (Driscoll, 1995).

The following section identifies six types of family-school-community connections that are accessible and matter in the development of school success, particularly in small, depressed and isolated rural school communities. This is not to argue against the notion that similar connections could also benefit urban schools.

Social Capital

Coleman (1987) conceptualized social capital as the "raising of children in the norms, the social networks, and the relationships between adults and children that are of value for the child's growing up" (p. 36). Individuals enjoy social capital by virtue of their membership in a family or community. This concept helps to explain how certain characteristics of families, neighborhoods, and communities affect student success in school. Although the idea of social capital relating to schools has been much debated, one could argue that in the absence of economic and human capital, poor, rural schools may be able to prosper through their strong relationships and tight bond with the community.

Building on the work of Coleman (e.g., 1988), Putnam (1994), and others in their study of five communities, Onyx and Bullen (2000) conclude that social capital is present where there is participation in networks, reciprocity, trust, social norms, the commons (shared ownership over resources), intergenerational closure, and social agency. They conclude that rural communities are more likely to have these characteristics than urban ones. They also suggest that social capital may not be available to everyone in a community, particularly outsiders and minorities, and that social capital in the community is more easily accessed by those who have higher levels of education, employment, and other resources. These limitations suggest that a community might have a bonding social capital but not one that is inclusive. Efforts to bring in minorities or others who are excluded help them share in the community's social capital. Social capital is an important ingredient in a parent-teacher-community model of school renewal.

Sense of Place

Rural residents often are less mobile than their urban counterparts and feel more connected to their place of residency. Community social capital is related to a sense of belonging and to a sense of place, strengthening bonds of connection. Sense of place involves a rootedness in one's community and the desire to cherish and cultivate one's local community (Howley, Harmon, & Leopald, 1996). Notably, Bushnell (1999), Hummon (1994), Lutz (1992), and Merz and Furman (1997), Orr (1992), and Perin (1977) have contributed significantly to the literature on a sense of place. Hummon (1994) argues that through our sense of residence, we form our worldview and understanding of other persons as well as ourselves. This is not to

say that people living in the same geographic community construct similar meanings, views, and a sense of community associated with where they live. In her study of the establishment of a private school in a re-born rural community, Bushnell found that former urbanites established their new sense of place through the school, whereas the long-standing rural inhabitants found their sense of place contested.

In this regard, Orr (1992) raises the question of what constitutes an ethical life. He argues that living alone is a fiction. We are all inextricably interconnected. To imagine otherwise is to demonstrate a lack of awareness of the wholeness of the community and of the world. Orr (1992) urges scholars and researchers to develop a more active understanding of place, including an intentional involvement with a place. He contrasts sustainable living with residency. The former requires "detailed knowledge of a place...and a sense of care and rootedness," whereas the latter only requires "cash and a map" (Orr, 1992, p. 5). Merz and Furman (1997) wonder, however, if rural communities, particularly those that are isolated or depressed can sustain a viable community without a school. In rural communities, important community meanings are embedded in the school and its traditions. Community social capital, based on a sense of place, can be actively engaged through the agency of a rural school.

Parent Involvement

Parents' involvement their children's education has been identified as an important predictor of student success (e.g., Epstein, 1995; Thompkins & Deloney, 1994). This involvement can take many forms, including volunteering at school, attending meetings and other school events, contacting the school about their children's progress, monitoring homework, talking to children about the school day, and talking about future education plans (e.g., Bauch, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Lippman, et al., 1996). Parent involvement with schools and with their children provides another type of family-school-community connection.

Researchers suggest that the small size and tightly knit social structure of rural communities foster increased parent involvement in all aspects of their children's lives, including education. One study found that parents whose children attended rural schools had significantly higher involvement in their children's education than did parents in any other community types (Sun, Hobbs, & Elder, 1994). Other studies have found that smaller urban and nonpublic schools have more frequent and varied opportunities for parents to be involved than larger urban schools (Bauch, 1992; Bauch & Goldring, 1996). Schools and communities with large amounts of social capital have a positive outcome on some types of parent involvement (Bauch, 1992; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore 1983). It is interesting to note, however, that parent participation in school governance is low in all types of schools. A school-community partnership model of school renewal would need to overcome issues of governance and provide opportunities for the community to share in school decision making.

Church Ties

Family, church, and school have been the traditional institutions that model social roles and norms (Cremin, 1976, 1978). Some communities, especially in rural areas, are religiously cohesive communities. In today's modern culture, the separation of church and state have relegated churches to a less dominant and public role in the education and development of children. Nonetheless, few studies have examined the nature of community church connections on school success, although some have found that families who are active in their churches provide additional social capital for their children that leads to school success (Bauch, 1992; 2001; Milevsky & Levitt, 2002).

Rural communities were often settled by families who shared a common church denomination. Prior to the establishment in 1836 of "free schools" as the law of the land, communities maintained their own church-related schools. Rural dwellers were reticent to give up church control over schools to a secular state office, particularly if that office were run by a clergyman of another denomination (Theobald, 1997). Some small communities, however, managed to avoid disengaging churches from public schools at late as the 1950s, particularly in small, rural, Catholic communities where Sisters taught in them as employees of the Catholic-dominated public school boards (Bauch, 1989). The doctrine of separation of church and state makes it difficult for some rural communities and is ignored by others in creating ties between the school and the local church

In a recent study of rural communities (Bauch, 2001), I found that ties between the local church congregation (usually there is only one) and the school are closely linked. Often ministers are employed as teachers, providing an additional authority figure in the school. Church volunteers provide tutoring and work in other volunteer programs at the local school. In one location, the local pastor goes into the school and willingly works with student discipline problems, not from a religious base, but from the perspective of what he knows about the child, his family, and child growth and development. Most of the teachers in that school teach Sunday school, where they are able to teach important moral lessons that they felt they could not teach in school during the week. They see this as having a direct connection and a positive outcome for their students' success in school.

School officials encouraged and were often proud of church involvement in their school. The local school district was proactive in providing structures and processes that permitted the church to help students. Public school leaders in this community remarked that the separation of church and state was not an issue, was rarely mentioned, and was viewed as "preventing progress." It is interesting to note that this was an all-black, poor, rural community. In a similarly poor but all-white rural community, the question of separation of church and state was constantly brought up as a way of keeping the local church out of the school. Both communities are religiously homogeneous.

The nature of church and school ties needs to be more closely examined to determine how churches contribute to the social capital of a community. President Bush's proposed grants to faith-based communities that provide charitable services may help to bridge this gap between the school and the church in ways that can increase social capital for students and their families.

School-Business-Agency Relationships

The current trend in defining school-community partnerships is to examine the connections among schools, local businesses, and community service agencies. Banks, businesses, local industries, cooperatives, and other venture groups work with local schools to provide resources both in the form of needed funds and in volunteering personnel who have special skills for teaching, technology, construction, repairs, maintenance, and other physical needs of the school. An example of the informality of such arrangements can be found in one of the poor, White rural communities I studied (Bauch, 2001). The school principal was from the community. She grew up and went to school with most of the local businesspersons. They all knew one another's families. She reported that when she needed funds for a project, she "gets on the phone." With pride she said, "My school is the focus of the community. The people in this community will do anything for the school. If I need something done, all I do is ask and it gets done" (p. 18). The principal enjoyed a high level of prestige in the community. Her Parent-Teacher Organization was very active, and she said that if people are not asked to do things, they complain to her.

Local business can also provide programs that ease the school-to-work transition and provide students with the skills and motivation they need to find post-school employment. Researchers and educators believe that helping students connect to local businesses will help curb the trend of out-migration of rural youth, especially those with high school diplomas and postsecondary education. If local employers begin recruiting locally, they give youth an incentive to stay in the community. Case studies in rural communities where school-to-work programs have been established have found enormous success and support of the programs from teachers, administrators, parents, and other members of the community (Miller, 1995, 1993, 1995). Yet, there is no systematic body of research on how widespread and helpful such programs are, particularly in poor, rural communities.

Community as a Curricular Resource

Rural communities are particularly positioned to serve as learning laboratories for the local school. Tight community connections provide schools with access to educational resources outside the classroom and in the community at large (e.g., Slattery, 1995; Stern, 1994). Curriculum of place can act as a lens or perspective around which a large variety of learning opportunities can be planned (Pinar, 1998; Slattery, 1995; Theobald, 1997). Historical sites, local oral history, geographical

formations, wilderness and wildlife experiences, land cultivation and development, forestry, and numerous community activities and events provide authentic learning experiences for students and motivate them to become interested in their communities. Involving students in community planning and seeking solutions to community problems benefits the community as well as students. Students gain a sense of place and belonging. Communities benefit from the insight and enthusiasm that students can bring to local issues. By building trust and reliance between students and other community members, the rural community grows stronger and out-migration of rural youth is slowed

Although a number of scholars, researchers, and educators have put forth these ideas, little or no research has been done to examine how many rural communities are using the local community as a curricular resource. In addition, it is not known how organizing this collaboration benefits student outcomes and strengthens community connections. Nonetheless, using the community as a curricular resource plays an important part in a teacher-parent-school community model of renewal.

Implications for Educational Leadership

For a partnership model of schooling to be effective, leadership at the school and district levels needs to be reconceived as relational. Lambert et al. (1995) offer a new view of leadership as constructivist. Constructivist leadership is "the reciprocal processes that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a common purpose of schooling" (p. 32). At the heart of constructivist leadership is the assumption "that adults in a community can work together to construct meaning and knowledge" (p. 32). Such processes require the formation of enduring relationships.

Reciprocal processes, as originally proposed by Foster (1989) and later developed by Lambert, et al. (1995), require a maturity that enables leaders to move outside themselves; to practice trust, caring, empathy, and compassion; to hear into understanding the perceptions and ideas of others; and to engage in processes of meaning making with others in an educational community over time. Capacities for reciprocity need to be developed. As Freire (1973) points out, "Knowledge is not extended from those who consider that they know to those who consider that they do not know; knowledge is built up in the relations between human beings" (p. 109). Constructivist leaders need to be able to deconstruct old myths and assumptions and to construct new meanings and understandings from these reciprocal processes. As new ideas, planning approaches, and goals and objectives emerge through conversation, the leader's actions need to be purposefully framed by these processes.

Conversation is a social endeavor and, thus, requires the context of a community for learning to occur. In her extensive and continuing work, Lieberman (1985, 1988, 1994) discusses the importance of relationships in collaborative work. Collaborative communities are the context within which human interaction occurs

and professionalism emerges. Constraints on knowledge come from interactions in the community, which require harmony whether the members agree or disagree. Being able to consider the views of others is basic in the formation of community partnerships. This is particularly important in diverse communities.

Constructivist leaders are flexible. They are often defined in terms of ecological qualities, which allow cycles to reoccur, an unrestrained flow of information and feedback, and spiraling processes that are essential to engagement and disengagement. Communities are always in motion. They are not static. Thus, constructivist leaders are open to change and welcome diverse thinking. They respond well to the need to reinvent.

Constructivist leaders are driven by a sense of moral purpose, not by institutional constraints and bureaucracies. Experiences in ecological communities, an image that fits rural communities well, can produce a common purpose for schooling, encompassing aims that extend beyond self-interest to the growth and well-being of children, their families, the local community, and society (Lambert et al., 1995,). Purpose, like vision, emerges from community conversations. School communities, thus become centers of growth for children, adults, and community leaders. A renewed sense of purpose is made possible through the patterns and processes of constructivist leadership.

School-community partnerships, led by constructivist leaders, can enable the growth of families, schools, and communities in a way that is, perhaps, more essential for rural than urban schools. Rural school renewal is not the imitation of urban reforms, but the joining together of schools and their local communities in the creation of something new that has meaning and understanding for students in rural school settings.

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